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SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN
JANUARY--JUNE, 1983

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This essay is concerned chiefly with exploring Soviet perceptions of Saudi Arabia and Iran during the first half of 1983, with a view towards identifying the motivations underlying Moscow's policies toward those states. The rationale for focusing on these countries is that both play key roles in the region, and therefore any nation attempting to shape events there, including the superpowers, and perhaps especially they, must necessarily try to deal with the problems and/or opportunities presented by these two states. The latter, however, do not exist in a vacuum. Therefore, some of the activities of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Jordan and Syria are discussed briefly to flesh out somewhat the context within which Moscow, Riyadh and Teheran were pursuing their policies towards each other and the region as a whole.

The first half of 1983 was chosen for review because several important events occurred then, making it an especially significant time. Three major initiatives for peace (The Reagan Plan, The Arab Plan, and the Brezhnev Plan) had been undertaken in September 1982, and were being pursued during the period under consideration. The PLO and Jordan held important talks aimed at resolving the Palestinian problem. The effects of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon were still being sharply felt. It appeared that the war had seriously eroded Soviet influence in the region, and conversely that the United States had been provided with an important opportunity. Indeed, Washington seized that opportunity, working assiduously to bring about an agreement between Lebanon and Israel, which in fact was signed on May 17, 1983. The May 17 agreement, as it came to be known, seemed to be a great victory for American

diplomacy. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia hinted that it might be willing to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Also, the Soviet Union and Egypt were moving towards a rapprochement. The Iraqi-Iranian War continued to destabilize the region. The Soviet Union decided to support Iraq in its struggle with Iran by resuming arms transfers to Baghdad. Teheran crushed the communist party (the Tudeh Party), asserting that the latter had conducted espionage for the Soviet Union. And finally, Afghanistan continued to poison the atmosphere.

After discussing Soviet-Saudi relations and Soviet-Iranian relations in the context of the foregoing developments, the essay describes Soviet policy towards some key actors in the region. It then concludes with a judgement about Moscow's response to the challenges it faced.

Viewing the situation from Moscow in early 1983, there were both negative and positive aspects of the Soviet-Saudi relationship. The negative elements involved several issues: (1) Riyadh's efforts to convene an Arab summit conference to seek a compromise between the Reagan and Arab plans; (2) PLO-Jordanian relations; (3) Saudi-Syrian relations; (4) the May 17 agreement; (5) Afghanistan; (6) Soviet-Yemen Arab Republic relations; and (7) Saudi-United States relations.

On September 1, 1982, President Reagan announced his plan for peace in the Middle East. This was followed by an Arab summit meeting held in Fez, Morocco, which concluded on September 9 with the publication of the Arab's own peace plan. Six days later, Leonid Brezhnev summarized the Soviet position on the same issue.

From the Soviet perspective, the two major and related aspects of the Reagan Plan were (1) Washington's determination to continue to exclude Moscow from the Middle East peace process, and (2) the attempt to draw Jordan into negotiations that would lead to some kind of federation between Jordan and a West Bank entity administered by Palestinians not members of the PLO. Both of these aims were anathema to the Soviet Union, the first for obvious reasons, and the second because a substantial degree of Moscow's influence in the Middle East resulted from the existence of the PLO. Indeed, the circumventing of that organization would have struck at the heart of Soviet interests in the region. In a phrase, the Soviets were totally opposed to the Reagan Plan, and therefore were against any Arab conference that might possibly move towards its acceptance. This was tantamount to being against any Arab conference that might have had the American initiative on its agenda even implicitly.

The Arab Plan, hammered out at Fez, consisted of eight points. Point seven called for United Nations Security Council guarantees of "peace among all states of the region, including [an] . . . independent Palestinian State." Thus, through its reference to "peace among all states of the region," the Arab Plan implied acceptance of Israel's right to exist. It also provided a role for the Soviet Union through the reference to the Security Council. The Arab Plan was consistent with the Soviet position in several ways. However, it did not explicitly provide a role for Moscow, and even more important it failed to reject explicitly the Reagan Plan. Nevertheless, Brezhnev said, "We positively assess the Fez proposals," which are not "at variance with long-held Soviet positions." It appeared that by accepting the Arab Plan, even though it fell far short of what the Soviets would have

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preferred, Moscow was attempting to remain relevant in the region.

The attempt to remain relevant was reflected in the Brezhnev Plan, which was articulated by the Soviet leader on September 15, and which consisted of six points: (1) Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories; (2) establishment of an independent Palestinian state; (3) return of East Jerusalem to the Arabs, with free access to holy places in all of Jerusalem; (4) security assurances for all countries in the region; (5) an end to the state of war between Israel and the Arab countries; and (6) guarantees of the settlement by the permanent members of the Security Council, or by the Security Council as a whole.¹ The combination of points four and five constituted a nearly explicit acceptance of Israel's right to exist, and point six provided a role in the peace process for the Soviet Union through its permanent membership on the Security Council. It was the latter point that made the Brezhnev Plan as unacceptable to the United States as was the Reagan Plan to the Soviet Union. Washington adamantly opposed Soviet participation in the peace process, whereas Moscow insisted on its right to be included.

A Saudi newspaper editorial described the Arab Plan as "the basis of the move towards the major powers . . . [in] . . . the Security Council" The paper also referred to "a comprehensive settlement . . . in accord with . . . the Arab Plan, while not disregarding other initiatives that in essence and ultimate objectives are not contradictory to the Arab Plan."² While "other initiatives" could have referred to both the Brezhnev and Reagan plans, it was probable that the latter was the focus. Indeed, the Arab Plan was seen by some observers as a response to the Reagan initiative. A cardinal point here was the willingness in some Arab quarters to seek a compromise

between the various initiatives. On the other hand, although Moscow had accepted the Fez resolutions themselves, to have gone beyond them would have been moving much too close to the Reagan Plan, and hence would have reinforced Moscow's exclusion from the peace process. The core of the Soviet position was that there would be no comprehensive peace in the region unless Moscow would be included in the negotiations.

The Fez summit had established a seven-member committee (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the PLO)³ which initially toured the capitals of four of the five permanent members of the Security Council⁴ to ascertain their views on how to move the peace process forward. Subsequently, the committee announced that it would hold a summit conference to assess the tour's results. Two of the points to be discussed at the conference threatened Soviet interests. First, similarities between the Arab and Reagan plans were to be indentified, with the aim of exploiting the positive aspects of the latter, so as to effect some progress. Thus, the committee announcement implied a willingness to compromise between the Fez and Reagan plans, precisely what Moscow was opposing. Second, the committee planned to ascertain at the projected meeting the extent to which Moscow had fulfilled its promise to promote a just peace. In this way, the committee could assess how "seriously" the Soviet Union wanted to contribute to a settlement.⁵ It can be noted parenthetically that the Saudi newspaper editorial cited earlier observed that previous Soviet support for a Palestinian state had been only "verbal and rhetorical without . . . playing an effective role."⁶ Regarding the first of these two points, it is probable tht Saudi

Arabia supported, and possibly even initiated, the attempt within the committee to incorporate elements of the Reagan Plan into a modified Arab position. This can be inferred from Saudi Arabia's relationship with the United States, which on balance was a positive one, and from Riyadh's role as a mediator in regional affairs. The attempt, by itself, would have been sufficient to earn substantial Soviet hostility for the Saudis, and the publicity expressed skepticism about Soviet "seriousness" could only have sharpened that hostility.

Another issue that negatively affected Soviet-Saudi affairs, namely PLO-Jordanian relations, reached one of its periodic climaxes in April 1983. The Saudi role in this drama was detrimental to Soviet interests, as was some of the press coverage during the denouement. In early April, King Hussein of Jordan and Yasir Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO and the leader of Fatah, the largest and most influential of the several factions that constitute the PLO, completed a Jordanian-PLO draft agreement that, if approved, would have committed Jordan and the PLO to enter into peace negotiations with Israel. The draft explicitly noted the necessity of adopting a political (as opposed to military) approach based on the Fez resolutions and in accord with the Reagan Plan. However, when Arafat attempted to secure approval of the draft by the PLO Executive Committee and the Central Committee of Fatah, three key amendments were insisted upon: deletion of all reference to the Reagan Plan; inclusion of a reference to the Palestinian peoples' right to self-determination; and a provision that PLO representation in any Jordanian-PLO delegation would have to come from well known members of the PLO leadership. In that Hussein had been

convinced from the outset that there could be no success unless the discussions remained within the framework of the Reagan Plan, the King could not accept the amendments, and the talks collapsed.⁷ The Saudi stance on the Hussein-Arafat talks was generally supportive. As the time for the talks approached some problems developed, but the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faysal, was reported to have told "two Palestinian leaders . . . that Saudi Arabia 'will eliminate the obstacles said to be blocking Jordanian-Palestinian coordination.'"⁸ After the talks collapsed, an editorial in the Saudi newspaper UKAZ sharply criticized the extremists in the PLO who had rejected the Hussein-Arafat draft, and also leveled a blistering criticism at Moscow, without actually naming it. The paper argued that the PLO extremists who rejected the agreement "serve the interests of other states that want [to participate] . . . in the comprehensive settlement negotiations" This was an unmistakable reference to the Soviet Union, and the editorial continued with the observation that

Roles in any case are not given. They are dictated by . . . realities The realities of the Palestinian case indicate that it is the United States . . . which can . . . pressure . . . Israel

Regrettably, we still entertain illusory ideas and other ideas imported from the communist East about [military] struggles, but those who boast about struggle have not actually engaged in it. They let the Palestinian . . . fighters do . . . [that] on their own in Beirut.⁹

This piercing allusion to Moscow concerned the Soviet failure to assist the PLO when it was being decimated during the Israeli siege of Beirut the previous summer. Another Saudi paper, AL-JAZIRAH, urged Palestinian leaders to prove to the United States that Israeli intransigence, not the PLO's posture, was "blocking a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict

... "10 This was a clear appeal to the PLO to moderate its position, thereby placing on Israel the responsibility for obstructing peace. Also, AL-JAZIRAH's concern that Israeli intransigence be proved to the United States (and by omission not to the Soviet Union) reinforced UKAZ's declaration that it was Washington (and again by the clearest of implications not Moscow) that could exert pressure on Israel. These stands could not have endeared the Saudi press to the Soviet leaders, nor could the latter have been pleased with the efforts of the Saudi Foreign Minister to facilitate a Jordanian-PLO accord so tenaciously opposed by Moscow.

Soviet-Saudi relations must also have been negatively affected by some differences between Saudi Arabia and Syria, a key actor through which Moscow exercised some influence in the Middle East. Among the issues that shaped Saudi-Syrian relations were the Reagan Plan and the possibility of an Arab summit; Jordanian-Palestinian relations and Syrian policy towards the PLO; and the Lebanese-Israeli agreement. In early January, the Syrian Foreign Minister, Abd al-Halim Khaddam, was reported to have informed Arab leaders that Damascus had rejected the Reagan Plan and would refuse to participate in the seven-member Arab committee, if the latter were to function at the summit level, or if it were to be chaired by King Hussein or the Moroccan leader, King Hassan.¹¹ Syrian hostility towards Hussein and Hassan was due, among other things, to their willingness to seek compromise approaches to peace. Riyadh, as noted earlier, was trying to effect such a compromise between the Arab and Reagan plans, and was making substantial efforts to unify the Arabs. A proposal then being circulated among Arab capitals suggested that a summit be held in February or at the Non-Aligned Summit meeting scheduled for March.¹² The Arab summit was not held,

in large measure because of Syrian opposition. Thus, Saudi and Syrian policies, as was the case with Saudi and Soviet policies, conflicted with each other on the Reagan Plan and any summit where it might be on the agenda. Syria's refusal to attend a summit was motivated by its desire to avoid pressure from other Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, to mitigate its opposition to the Reagan Plan. Damascus also decried what it described as loud calls by reactionary Arab leaders urging the Palestinians to begin negotiations with Jordan within the framework of the Reagan Plan,¹³ which is just what Riyadh appeared to be doing. In fact, the negotiations between Arafat and Hussein described earlier were begun in early April. Had those negotiations been successfully concluded, both Syrian and Soviet interests would have been damaged seriously, for the American approach to a peace settlement would have been well under way. Hence, "Syria informed the leaders of the Palestinian resistance that any decision by Arafat toward accepting the United States initiative would be directly countered by the establishment of a PLO that would replace the existing one."¹⁴ Syria also threatened to withdraw its recognition of Fatah, if Arafat were to persist in moving towards the U.S. position.¹⁵ Although one report suggested that Saudi Arabia was itself not enthusiastic about an agreement restricted to Jordan and the PLO, it at the very least supported such an agreement within a pan-Arab framework.¹⁶ It was precisely such a framework that Riyadh was trying to forge, and which Syria was resisting by refusing to attend a summit. Hence, Damascus and Riyadh were pursuing conflicting policies on both the substance of the Palestinian issue and mechanisms to cope with the problem. Moreover, when a mutiny occurred within the PLO in May over Arafat's leadership,¹⁷ Syria supported the dissidents.¹⁸ Clearly, then, Syria's actions complicated Saudi efforts to effect some degree of Arab unity for the

purpose of efficiently confronting Israel.

The Lebanese-Israeli agreement of May 17, 1983 also complicated Saudi-Syrian relations. The aim of the agreement, which was arranged by the United States, was to bring about the removal of all foreign troops from Lebanon. The Syrian press, however, insisted that there was no comparison between the Syrian and Israeli military presences in Lebanon. Syrian forces had been invited into that country by its government, it was pointed out, and therefore they would not withdraw until the last Israeli soldier had left Lebanon.¹⁹ Although "knowledgeable circles", ^{reported} that Damascus was willing to receive U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz to listen to any proposals that he might have had, it was said that this was not to be taken as an attempt by Syria to prepare the way for modifying its "declared position."²⁰ However, Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam did seem to suggest some flexibility, although possibly only for public consumption. When asked in an interview whether he supported the convening of an Arab summit in connection with the Lebanese situation, he replied that in principle Syria was not opposed to any Arab meeting, but that prior preparations were necessary for success. He went on to refer to the meeting scheduled for that same day between King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and Syrian President Asad as an example of "joint Arab action and the quest for a minimum common basis . . . that . . . [would] serve . . . common objectives"²¹ That "quest" proved unsuccessful, however, for as the situation developed, the unequivocal nature of Syria's opposition to the May 17 agreement became clear. Indeed, Damascus was able to bring about the abrogation of the agreement in the spring of the following year.²²

Saudi statements on the agreement were mixed,²³ with some expressing support for, and others opposition to, the agreement,²⁴ while still others were non-committal.²⁵ Nevertheless, the Saudi Information Minister did in effect provide official Saudi support on the day the agreement was signed when he said that "the Kingdom . . . respected the legitimate government of Lebanon" and its decision to enter into the agreement.²⁶ The following day the Domestic Service of Riyadh Radio also expressed support, and on the same day UKAZ published its sharply worded editorial condemning rejection of the agreement as "a service to the Zionist state and to Soviet influence in the region"²⁷ In addition, the Saudi newspaper, AL JAZIRAH, compared America's success in achieving the agreement to the "enormous power" of the Soviet Union to block solutions.²⁸ Thus, on the Lebanese, as well as on the Palestinian and summit issues, Riyadh and Damascus were pursuing different goals, and in that Syrian and Soviet aims were generally the same on these issues, Saudi-Syrian differences must have negatively affected Saudi-Soviet relations.

Yet another issue that created difficulties between the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia was Moscow's occupation of Afghanistan. Riyadh Domestic Radio referred to "the blatant Soviet invasion" of Afghanistan, noting that the occupation of that country was "very costly" to the Soviet Union's international reputation, especially in the third world. It was said that ". . . the Soviet Union has shed the lamb's fleece it often parades in, and has exposed the claws of the wolf Moreover [the Radio continued, Afghanistan] is . . . one of the most prominent problems threatening detente, with all the [negative] results . . . --alliances and blocs--that this involves."²⁹ Even before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the Saudi assessment of the Soviet Union certainly must have been much closer to the image of the wolf than the

lamb, but it was significant that this view was expressed publicly in such sharp terms. The commentary reflected Saudi concern over the practice of the superpowers to approach issues and problems from the perspective of East-West competition, thereby polarizing the world in general, and increasing regional dangers in particular. Another expression of that concern came in March 1983, when the Saudi Foreign Minister urged the Non-Aligned Conference "to condemn and denounce the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan."³⁰

Saudi concern was also elicited by Soviet relations with North Yemen. In early 1983, the possibility that Sana might sign a treaty with Moscow was under discussion. At a news conference in Paris, the Saudi Minister of Defense and Aviation, Prince Sultan, observed that "If North Yemen deems it in its interest to conclude a treaty with the Soviet Union, it can do so." Sultan, however, continued with the rhetorical question, "what . . . threats . . . are forcing North Yemen to conclude a treaty, whether it be with the East or West? In my opinion, . . . there is nothing that threatens the security of North Yemen that calls for concluding . . . [any] treaty, except under the auspices of the Arab League"³¹ This pronouncement was consistent with Saudi declaratory policy in general, which had always opposed penetration of the region by either superpower, on the grounds that an incursion by one would elicit a reaction by the other, which in turn would escalate in a cumulative way. Ultimately, the superpower presence would be overwhelming, and the freedom of the regional states would thereby be threatened.

In practice, however, Riyadh had a close and generally positive relationship with Washington, especially regarding arms transfers, but also in economic, and, to a lesser extent, political affairs as well.³² In

characterizing United States-Saudi relations, Sultan said that "putting aside our differences with United States policy on many matters, the present U.S. Government has been better than previous [ones] . . . in its response to . . . Arab . . . thinking and to [achieving] peace . . . , regardless of our disagreements . . . on method." Sultan also reported that the Saudi and American "Defense Minsters" would meet annually, and indicated that U.S. Secretary of Defense Weinberger had "agreed to anything that would be useful [in] . . . upgrading U.S. weapons in the Kingdom's possession." Sultan also observed that the United States was trying its best to get Israel to withdraw from Lebanon.³³ Notwithstanding the reservations about "policy differences on many matters" and "disagreements . . . on methods," Sultan's statement in both tone and substance reflected close ties between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and should be juxtaposed to the Saudi Defense Minister's opposition to increased Soviet influence in the region that would result from a Soviet-North Yemen treaty. Most especially, the reference to Washington's attempts to secure Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon should be juxtaposed to Sultan's opposition to the proposed treaty, for in these instances U.S. policy was consistent with a Saudi goal, whereas Soviet policy clashed with the Saudi interest of preventing further penetration of the region by either superpower.

In contra-distinction to all these negative aspects of Saudi behavior, there were characteristics of that behavior viewed by Moscow as positive. For example, in January 1983, for the first time in the history of Soviet-Saudi relations, the Saudi Foreign Minister visited the Soviet Union, thereby exhibiting a pragmatism that must have been welcomed in Moscow.³⁴ The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister was asked in a press conference about this development, and he said

that "When someone works for a cause, he does not take into account whether his country does or does not have relations with another nation Saudi Arabia did what it believed was good for . . . [the Arab] cause."³⁵

An equally striking manifestation of this Saudi pragmatism was exhibited only two months later. In an interview with a Kuwaiti newspaper, the Head of the Saudi National Guard, Prince Abdallah, said that

The USSR is a great power and I support the establishment of relations with it, but at the right time. We must contemplate doing this. The Soviets now have relations with some Gulf countries What has changed? The great powers give us as much as . . . [that which benefits themselves] [They make] . . . their own calculations. We, too, must have our . . . calculations." ³⁶

Notwithstanding the qualifications about timing and the calculating nature of the great powers, and although it has not borne fruit to this day, the public expression of interest in establishing diplomatic relations was clearly a positive development from the Soviet perspective. Moreover, that pragmatic orientation was reinforced the following month by a statement in the Saudi newspaper AL-RIYADH, which indirectly seemed to solicit both a Soviet offer to establish relations with Saudi Arabia and measures by Moscow that would have made such an offer meaningful. AL-RIYADH first expressed skepticism about a Soviet statement on the likelihood of an Israeli-Syrian war, which was much discussed in the regional press at the time. The newspaper then noted that the Soviet statement did not

. . . as usual, . . . bind [Moscow] . . . to do anything . . . that could lead to a limited confrontation with the United States However, . . . the next stage for the Soviets is to look for a new role compatible with the 1980s because the Soviets will not accept the loss of [potential?] new allies and the squandering of opportunities that are now open to them . . . [to weave] a new carpet for, and . . . [to participate] in, a future peace. ³⁷

This seemed to be an invitation to Moscow to abandon its traditional practice of negatively exploiting situations for propagandistic purposes (for example, the Soviet focus on the potential for an Israeli-Syrian war), and instead to exploit positively the "new opportunities" by undertaking steps that would earn for Moscow a role in the peace process. Just as it called upon the Soviet Union "to look for a new role compatible with the 1980s," AL-RIYADH urged the Arabs "to draw up a new strategy based on the interests of the Arab nation," and "to be careful in playing the cards of the superpowers" ³⁸ The cryptic reference to "new allies" for the Soviets, combined with the admonition to the Arabs "to draw up a new strategy," might have been a hint that Riyadh would readjust its relations with Moscow and Washington by supporting Soviet participation in the peace process. In return, Moscow would have to move closer to the Saudi position on the Lebanese and Palestinian issues, and also would have to urge Syria to do likewise.

Riyadh's motivations for what appeared to be a shift towards Moscow were expressed by the international affairs editor of UKAZ, who wrote that although the United States might oppose Moscow's participation, the Soviet Union was "one of the two superpowers responsible for world security and stability," and therefore it could not be excluded from the Middle East peace process. A comprehensive settlement, he wrote, would have to be guaranteed, and thus the participation of both superpowers was necessary and in Arab interests. Also, the Soviet Union's friendship with "certain Arab countries (an obvious reference to Syria and Libya) would enable Moscow to convince them to negotiate a comprehensive settlement. Moreover, "the Soviet Union would lend . . . equilibrium to the balance-of-power in the

region."³⁹ In brief, AL-RIYADH was recognizing that Moscow could negatively affect the situation by frustrating any peace arrangement to which it might be opposed; that conversely it could positively affect the situation by exerting pressure on Syria and Libya to permit the peace process to move forward; and that the Arabs could use the threat of drawing closer to the Soviet Union for the purpose of persuading the United States to wring concessions from Israel.

A major factor underlying the Saudis efforts for peace, and their attempt to exploit the "Soviet card" in this regard, was Riyadh's need for stability in the entire region. Generally, the greater the turbulence in the area, the greater the potential for an overthrow of the Saudi regime. Specifically, both the Palestinian problem, which was sorely exacerbated by the Lebanese crisis, and Islamic fundamentalism represented threats to Riyadh. Without a resolution of the Palestinian problem, there would always be a potential for violence, and the Saudi regime could have been the victim of that violence either directly, or indirectly, through subversion. The turbulence generated by the Iraqi-Iranian war, combined with several calls from Teheran for the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, substantially increased that threat. The war was also financially costly to Riyadh, which subsidized Iraq's war effort, although apparently not as generously as Baghdad would have liked.⁴⁰ Finally, Saudi Arabia was forced by Damascus' support of Iran to choose between supporting either Syria or Iraq, both Arab states, on an issue involving non-Arab Iran. The fact that there could have been no question but what Riyadh would support Iraq did not mean that the decision was without cost for Saudi Arabia. Opposing Syria on the Iraqi-Iranian war issue surely must have made more difficult Riyadh's already staggeringly

complex task of mediating in the Arab-Israeli conflict between Syria, on the one hand, and the PLO, Jordan and the United States, on the other. Given these considerations, plus Riyadh's need for stability in the entire area from the Gulf to the Mediterranean, Saudi efforts to bring an end to the Iraqi-Iranian war were hardly surprising.

The Soviets also wanted stability in the area. In the western part of the region, the Lebanese and Palestinian crises created problems in Soviet-Saudi relations, as demonstrated earlier. More important for Moscow than problems with Saudi Arabia, however, were the tensions these crises generated in the Soviet-Syrian-PLO triangular relationship.⁴¹ Syria and the PLO were Moscow's main sources of influence in the region, therefore the tensions created in that triangular relationship were of no small moment to the Soviets. Although in the eastern part of the region the Soviets originally welcomed the overthrow of America's ally, the Shah of Iran, they soon learned that Washington's loss could not be translated easily into an equal gain for themselves. There were several reasons for this, a key one of which involved the paradox that the very event so warmly welcomed by Moscow--the blow to the U.S. position in the region--led to a substantially increased direct American military presence in the area, a negative development from the Soviet perspective.⁴²

Moreover, the turbulence and unpredictability generated on Soviet borders by the Iranian Revolution, especially given the Muslem nature of the Central Asian Republics, were unsettling for Moscow.⁴³ Also, the negative implications of that turbulence and unpredictability for Saudi Arabia were not in Soviet interests. Moscow would have had little to gain, and possibly much to lose, if the Saudi regime would have been destabilized,

unless its replacement would have been firmly oriented towards, and fully cooperative with, the Soviet Union. Such a notion, however, strains credulity. The greater likelihood would have been the establishment of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Riyadh that would have reinforced and emboldened Teheran's leaders, thereby contributing to even greater volatility and unpredictability. Also, a radical government in Riyadh would have immediately withdrawn financial support from Baghdad, hence undermining Iraq, which by this time Moscow was supporting in its struggle with Iran. If Iraq were to have been defeated, Khomeinism would have spread throughout the Gulf, a development which would have afforded the Soviet Union little comfort. In sum, then, both the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia had a common interest in curtailing regional turbulence in general, although the degree to which each was committed to regional stability depended upon the intensity of the unrest, whom its victims were, and precisely where in the Middle East-Gulf area it was occurring.

Soviet-Saudi interests were more consistently in tune with each other as regards the Iraqi-Iranian War than with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In large measure, this was because the latter conflict was encumbered by so many clashing interests, intertwined complications and generally maximalist demands by most of the key actors. The Gulf war, by comparison only, was a simpler phenomenon, although Syrian policy did complicate matters for both Riyadh and Moscow. Syrian policy aside for a moment, the Soviet Union supported Iraq in its struggle with Iran during the period under review, which brings us to a consideration of Soviet-Iranian relations.

Those relations were at a low ebb in the spring of 1983, and five key issues contributed to that state of affairs: Afghanistan; the Iraqi-Iranian War; the Khomeini regime's treatment of the Tudeh Party; hostile Iranian rhetoric against the Soviet Union; and Iran's activities in Lebanon. As early as January 1980, press and diplomatic sources in Teheran reported that Afghan guerrillas had been receiving aid for well over a year from the Baluchi minority in Iran. That aid was believed to have been increasing as a result of the Soviet invasion,⁴⁴ and in 1981 Western journalists reported Afghan rebels ". . . as driving jeeps obtained from Iran" ⁴⁵ Soviet-Iranian relations by 1983 had deteriorated to the point where an Iranian newspaper editorial criticized Soviet Middle East policy for its "'doubledealing,'" pointing out that while Soviet propaganda portrayed Marxism as partial towards Islam, the Soviet Union had sent troops to Afghanistan and had rushed arms to Iraq to be used against Iran.⁴⁶

The impact of the Iraq-Iranian War on Soviet-Iranian relations was substantial. Major international actors want to control, rather than be controlled by, events. Therefore, since the beginning of the war Moscow had repeatedly called for its termination, pointing to its high costs for both protagonists, and arguing that it benefitted only the imperialists. While some argued that the superpowers wanted the war to continue,⁴⁷ there were indications that Moscow genuinely wanted the conflict to end. Although the Soviets had suspended arms shipments to

Baghdad after the war began, so as to avoid alienating the Khomeini regime, which Moscow then was still hoping would be a "progressive" one,⁴⁸ the new Andropov leadership resumed those shipments in early January 1983. THE DAILY TELEGRAM of London claimed that Iraqi officials had made a secret visit to Moscow, during which Andropov offered a resumption of arms transfers in return for which Iraq would be required to give up a number of border territories to Iran,⁴⁹ presumably a move conducive to peace. Also, in early April, Moscow was reported to have sent a strongly worded memorandum to Teheran regarding the latter's ". . . intransigent rejection of ending the war" The memorandum indicated that the Soviet Union could "no longer tolerate Iran's kindling the fire of war in the sensitive Gulf region and that Moscow . . . [did] not care to see the Iranian regime . . . isolated even from some eastern bloc countries, which had maintained "a minimum level of friendship with Teheran." The memorandum also indicated that the Soviet Union was urging North Korea to suspend arms shipments to Iran.⁵⁰ Thus, Moscow was exerting major pressure on the Iranians, both through its own actions and through its allies. Whether that pressure was designed to end the war, or, as some would argue, only to prevent Iran from winning it, the negative effect on Soviet-Iranian relations would have been great in either case.

For its part, the Khomeini regime was contributing to a worsening of Soviet-Iranian relations not only through its stubbornness on the war and its support of Afghanistan, but also by its attack on Iranian communists and their asserted ties to the Soviet Union. In late January, Teheran Radio reported that twenty-two members of the Union of Iranian communists had been executed the previous year for "'frightful crimes.'" Their trial, the Radio asserted, was a trial of "the entire process of Marxism, blasphemy and atheism in Iran. . . ." It was added that all Iranian communists, including those calling themselves followers of the imam's line, had supported the activities of "'counterrevolutionaries.'"⁵¹ The following month, the Secretary General of the Tudeh Party, Nurreddin Kianuri, was arrested on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.⁵² A PRAVDA editorial responded on February 19 rejecting the espionage charges, and asserting that "reactionary Iranian circles" were trying to undermine Soviet-Iranian relations. In what appeared to have been an attempt to prevent further deterioration in those relations, the editorial pointed to Soviet economic support extended to Iran when the United States had been applying sanctions against Teheran.⁵³ That attempt, however, was unsuccessful. In April, the Teheran regime placed Kianuri on public television where he confessed that his party was guilty of six errors, among them spying for the Soviet Union.⁵⁴ This was an obvious and calculated escalation of Soviet-Iranian tensions, and less than two weeks later Teheran Radio reported that over one thousand members of the Tudeh Party had been arrested.⁵⁵ PRAVDA dismissed Kianuri's confession, and the confessions of the other Tudeh leaders, as having been extracted by torture, a method inherited, it was said, from the Shah's secret police.⁵⁶ These events were accompanied by the dismemberment of the Tudeh Party and by the expulsion of eighteen Soviet diplomats from

Teheran. Although these two events were not explicitly linked together, they obviously were directly related. Several Washington officials believed that the main reason for the expulsion had been the resumption of Soviet arms transfers to Iraq, and one view was that those transfers placed Iran at a "'considerably disadvantage'" in the war. The Soviets responded to the expulsion by calling ^{it} "'arbitrary and totally unfounded' and a 'malicious provocation.'"⁵⁷

These concrete actions were accompanied by Iranian rhetoric that placed the Soviet Union in the company of the United States, France and Iraq in their hostility to Iran. Teheran frequently repeated its "neither East nor West" formulation,⁵⁸ thereby implying that the Soviet Union was as great a "Satan" as the United States. The Speaker of the Iranian Parliament condemned an Iraqi missile attack on the Iranian city of Dezful, noting that "the USSR and France were 'greatly involved in this crime,' as they were the manufacturers of the missiles."⁵⁹ An Iranian newspaper also made the unsubstantiated claim that Iraqi attacks on Iranian cities were "triggered by Iraqi anger at the loss of valuable information supplied by Soviet spies in Iran following the dissolution of the Tudeh Party. . . ."⁶⁰

The Iranians were also contributing to a greater degree of instability in Lebanon than the Soviets perhaps desired. Given the many Soviet pronouncements to the effect that Syria, which was deeply engaged in Lebanon, would not "stand alone" if she were to be attacked by Israel, it was essential that Moscow attempt to prevent such an attack so as to avoid a confrontation with Israel, and therefore with the United States. Although it was highly probable that the Soviets were guaranteeing only Syrian territory against Israeli

attack, and not Syrian troops on Lebanese territory, Moscow, nevertheless, would have been faced with a painful choice again, if indeed Israeli and Syrian forces had clashed in Lebanon. When that had happened in 1982, the Soviets had essentially abandoned the Syrians and the PLO, and as a result their credibility in the Arab world had suffered. Therefore, Moscow's massive rearming of Syria after the Beirut siege and its warnings to Israel in the spring of 1983 not to attack Syria can be understood either as attempts to deter any possible Israeli attack, or, if Moscow did not truly think that such an attack was imminent, to create a false crisis. Such a crisis would provide a risk-free opportunity to "demonstrate" Soviet support for the Arab cause in general and for Moscow's major ally, Syria, in particular. Even if the crisis was falsely created, Iran's activities in Lebanon added a degree of instability to the situation that was at cross-purposes with the Soviet interest in controlling developments. Also, Teheran's activities in Lebanon and the unacceptable demands it posed as a price for ending the Iraqi-Iranian War placed Iran on the opposite side of the barricades from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, with whom the Soviet Union wanted to improve relations.⁶¹

On the other side of the ledger of Soviet-Iranian relations there were some positive entries that should be noted. In spite of the open hostility between Moscow and Teheran, communications between the two protagonists were not completely shut off. In April 1983, the Soviet Foreign Minister travelled to Teheran, for bilateral talks,⁶² and within two weeks the resumption of air travel between the two capitals was announced.⁶³ as were bilateral shipping talks between the two countries.⁶⁴ These developments, however, were more than offset by the Iraqi-Iranian War and the other

factors described above.

The Iraqi-Iranian War raises the issue of Soviet-Syrian relations. Certainly Moscow was supportive of Syria in general, because the latter was perhaps the most important channel through which the Soviets influenced Middle East developments and challenged U.S. policy in the region. It was for this reason that they resupplied Syria after the Beirut siege; it was for this reason that they warned Israel not to attack Syria in the spring of 1983; it was for this reason that they supported Syria's opposition to the Lebanese-Israeli agreement, thereby helping to bring about its abrogation the following year; and it was for this reason that they threw their weight onto the Syrian side of the scales in the Asad-Arafat clash that was intensifying during the period under consideration. Indeed, Arafat's movement towards acceptance of the U.S. approach to resolving the Palestinian problem reinforced Soviet-Syrian relations in a major way.

Nonetheless, some Syrian policies posed problems for Moscow. Salient among these was Syria's support for Iran in the Iraqi-Iranian War, which must have made more difficult than it otherwise would have been Moscow's decision to resume arms shipments to Iraq and to exert pressure on Iran to end the war. Syria's support for Iran must also have elicited requests from Saudi Arabia that Moscow urge Damascus to withdraw its support of Teheran. Regarding the Lebanese situation, it seems reasonable to speculate, if not to assume, that Damascus would have preferred Moscow to make an explicit and public promise to commit Soviet military power directly in support of Syrian troops in Lebanon, rather than limiting that kind of support to Syrian territory.

The mixture of positive and negative elements in Soviet-Syrian relations and the grim state of Soviet-Iranian relations contrasted with the

potential for the Soviet Union to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This is not to suggest that the Soviet Union was contemplating a radical shift of alliances in the region or any fundamental reordering of priorities.

However, with Andropov's accession to power, Moscow did pursue a more multi-faceted and vigorous policy in the area. This was reflected in the Soviet positions on the Iraqi-Iranian War; Afghanistan; Lebanon; PLO-Soviet relations; the Arab-Israel conflict; Soviet-Saudi relations, Soviet declaratory policy towards Israel; and Soviet-Egyptian relations.

Regarding the Iraqi-Iranian War, the Soviets took the decisive step of rearming Iraq. Also, when pressuring Iran to negotiate an end to the conflict, Moscow was reported to have been ready to urge Syria to end its close ties with Iran,⁶⁵ which would have increased pressure on the latter. These steps were taken for several reasons. Foremost was the danger that the war might spread throughout the region, a development that possibly could have had negative implications for the internal situation in the Central Asian Republics of the Soviet Union, and certainly would have complicated Soviet policy decisions regarding the Middle East-Gulf region. Even without spreading, the Iraqi-Iranian War was already jeopardizing Moscow's ability to shape developments in the Arab-Israel conflict, because it was increasingly alienating other Arab regimes from Syria, the main channel through which the Soviets could influence the Arab-Israeli struggle. Also, Iran's presence in Lebanon contributed to a continuation of the turbulence in that country, although it must be acknowledged that the turmoil would have continued in the absence of any Iranian presence. Nonetheless, there was nothing that Iran could accomplish in Lebanon that would redound to Moscow's benefit,

including the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in April and the destruction of the U.S. Marine compound in October, which could not have been accomplished by other actors. Finally, Teheran's hostility towards Moscow itself and the dismemberment of the Tudeh Party completed the list of major transgressions against Soviet interests. Those transgressions were more than sufficient to elicit the concrete Soviet steps against Iran referred to above. Those steps, in turn, were a positive factor in Soviet-Saudi relations, given Riyadh's opposition to the Gulf war and the dangers to Saudi stability represented by Khomeini's regime.

Soviet policy in Afghanistan also warrants at least brief treatment here. The Prime Minister of that country said that direct and serious negotiations with his government could lead to a solution of the "'Afghan tangle.'" He added that the indirect talks in Geneva between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which had been facilitated by the United Nations an effort to resolve the Afghan problem, had yielded positive results, and that Kabul would cooperate to narrow existing differences.⁶⁶ Also, President Zia of Pakistan said that "the Soviet Union is willing to consider withdrawing, but wants guarantees against future interference and intervention in Afghanistan, and also assurances that a withdrawal . . . will not leave its 'soft underbelly' (unprotected.)"⁶⁷ Whatever one's assessment of the condition of the Soviet Union's "underbelly," it should be noted that Soviet sources in Geneva said that the indirect talks had "concentrated on the refugee question as a way of beginning secret contacts with the Afghan resistance,"⁶⁸ possibly a sign of serious Soviet intent. Also, according to the Pakistani Foreign Minister, Andropov said that "Soviet forces may withdraw from Afghanistan."⁶⁹

Indeed, in some ways a withdrawal would have ^{been} beneficial to the Soviet Union, for it would have removed a hinderence to better relations with Muslim

nations in general and Arab states in particular. Also, the Afghan Prime Minister acknowledged that the activities of the counterrevolutionaries and their foreign supporters had "seriously affected" the country's economy.⁷⁰

In addition, Riyadh Radio referred to

"political reports . . . that senior Soviet intelligence officers [were] . . . relentlessly seeking a formula which would rid them of . . . [their Afghan dilemma], . . . which one senior Soviet leader . . . [called] our Vietnam. [It was a war, he was reported to have said, that] can not be won and can not be abandoned." ⁷¹

However, nothing concrete developed from these pronouncements, and Afghanistan remained a major obstacle to improving Soviet-Saudi relations, as well as a factor exacerbating Soviet-Iranian relations.

As for Soviet policy in Lebanon, Soviet military experts entered that country to assess the lessons of the 1982 war. "Thereafter, more and more Soviet advisors were seen in Syrian units, including units deployed in Lebanon." This was a departure from the previous pattern, when Soviet military advisors attached to Syrian units had taken care to remain on Syrian territory.⁷² Also, a statement attributed to the Soviet Ambassador to Lebanon, Alexander Soldatov, although seemingly made reluctantly, suggested a more active Soviet policy. At first, Soldatov took a cautious stance when asked by journalists whether the Soviet Union would intervene in the event of an Israeli-Syrian war. He was reported by one source to have replied that "We view this as a hypothetical question." However, when pressed further on the same occasion, he was reported by another source to have added that Moscow would intervene.⁷³ In addition, the Soviet press frequently reported that Israel was planning to attack Syria,⁷⁴ which the Israelis denied. It is difficult to demonstrate empirically whether Moscow genuinely believed that Israel was going to strike at Syria, or whether the Soviets were only

trying to create a situation that would enable them to proclaim their support for Damascus, as mentioned earlier. Regardless of which interpretation one favors, the least that can be said in either case is that the Soviets were pursuing a more activist policy than during the Beirut crisis.

In terms of galvanizing Soviet policy in Lebanon, however, the imminent agreement between that country and Israel was almost certainly more important than the relatively unlikely prospect that Israel would attack Syria. Indeed, it is possible that the creation of a crisis was designed in part to give Lebanon pause regarding the signing of the agreement, for the latter was a major threat to Soviet interests. Iran was also opposed to the agreement, and thus was on the same side of this issue as was the Soviet Union. However, this could not have counted heavily in Soviet-Iranian relations, given the tensions in those affairs described above. By contrast, Lebanon was an important issue for Saudi Arabia, and Moscow's opposition to the agreement, which Riyadh supported, was a substantive problem in Soviet-Saudi relations.

The tempo of Soviet-PLO relations also intensified during this period. In a private meeting in Moscow between Arafat and Andropov, the former was reported to have brought up Soviet passivity during the Beirut siege, and the latter was cited as saying, "'Give us until spring.'" ⁷⁵ When spring came, however, it was the PLO Chairman himself, upon whom heavy Soviet pressure was brought to bear because of his apparent willingness in his April talks with King Hussein to adopt the U.S. approach to peace. ⁷⁶ That was a development the Soviets could not possibly have accepted.

As for improving relations with Saudi Arabia, Soviet policy in the Gulf was conducive to that end. Soviet pressure on Teheran to end the war,

the broadening of cooperation with Baghdad beyond the arms transfers, and the probable urging of Damascus to break its close ties with Teheran were all measures that found favor in Riyadh. The Soviet pressure on Arafat was also important, but its impact on Soviet-Saudi relations might have been ambiguous. On the one hand, there was the report that Riyadh was unenthusiastic about the Hussein-Arafat talks, preferring instead a broader Arab forum,⁷⁷ which suggests that the Saudis would have approved of the Soviet pressure on Arafat. On the other hand, there was the reported Saudi willingness to help eliminate obstacles to "'Jordanian-Palestinian coordination.'" ⁷⁸ Moreover, the Saudis clearly were willing to compromise with the Americans in order to make progress on the Arab-Israel conflict, an approach to which the Soviets were totally opposed.

Also related to the Arab-Israeli conflict was the hint of a possible change in Soviet policy towards Israel. In its pronouncements on the conflict, Moscow's stance towards Tel Aviv evolved in a positive direction. Prior to the Brezhnev Plan of September 1982, the Soviet formulation regarding the right of countries to an "independent and secure existence" referred generally to "all nations of the area," only occasionally "including the state of Israel," if the given Soviet spokesman were pressed. The Brezhnev Plan, however, ~~almost~~ specifically identified Israel as a country with such a right. Subsequently, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko seemed to go even further. In the spring of 1983, only a few days after Moscow had issued its harsh warning to Israel not to attack Syria, Gromyko said that the Soviet Union opposed "extremist plans" to destroy Israel. Thus, Moscow was articulating a more balanced position on the Arab-Israeli conflict than its previous one. In the view of one Israeli observer, the

Soviets were doing so because they wanted to participate in the peace process, and realized that such participation required a demonstration that the Soviet Union was no longer so "one-sided," and if included in the process would not unambiguously support the Arabs. On the other hand, this implication, combined with Moscow's earlier loss of credibility in the Arab world, required that the latter be reassured, which was the function of the warning to Israel not to attack Syria. Notwithstanding this reassurance, it was argued that Moscow's movement towards a more even-handed approach, and the context within which it occurred, represented a long-term policy. The Lebanese war, it was said, should have had a negative effect on Soviet policy towards Israel, rather than a move in the opposite direction.⁷⁹

This interpretation might have gone too far in suggesting a basic, long-term shift in Soviet policy towards Israel. Nevertheless, Gromyko's elaboration of the Soviet position was significant, a fact that could not have been lost on the Arabs, especially the Saudis. It is important to note that Gromyko's "pro-Israeli" statement came in early April, that is, after Prince Abdallah, on March 22, had indicated his support for establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, "at the right time."⁸⁰ While there might not have been a causal relationship between the two statements, the Saudis certainly must have viewed Gromyko's remark in the context of Abdallah's earlier one. Riyadh could have seen the Soviet statement as a rebuff, in that Moscow was moderating its stance towards the enemy--Israel. Conversely, Riyadh might have welcomed the Gromyko statement as a Soviet attempt to establish its credentials with Israel, thereby positioning

itself for the constructive role in the peace process that the Saudis were calling upon the Soviets to play. In any event, the Soviets must have been telling the Saudis privately that this was Moscow's intent, given the latter's long-standing desire to establish relations with Riyadh.

In another move to pursue a more active policy in the region, while simultaneously projecting a more moderate image, Moscow was seeking to establish relations with Egypt. In fact, it had been attempting to do since President Mubarak, in his inaugural speech in October 1981, had proclaimed a policy of non-alignment for Egypt, saying that Cairo would not be a part of anyone's strategy.⁸¹ Mubarak's implication was that he intended to de-emphasize somewhat Egypt's close ties with the United States, or would be willing to improve relations with the Soviet Union, or to combine both of these elements in some degree. A Soviet official in Moscow, when speaking with an Egyptian journalist in January 1983 said "we were optimistic" regarding Mubarak's speech, and therefore "... the ice began to thaw in Moscow, but it does not seem to have begun to do so in Cairo." The journalist further reported that the Soviets were not hiding their interest in improving Soviet-Egyptian relations sooner rather than later.⁸² Roughly a month hence "a ranking Soviet diplomat . . . expressed hope for a return of Egyptian-Soviet relations to their normal level in the near future on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interests."⁸³

The fairly pronounced Soviet desire to strengthen ties with Egypt was motivated by several factors. The Egyptian journalist cited above reported a Soviet Foreign Ministry official as describing the general goal of Soviet foreign policy in the following unequivocal terms: "Our interest is that more new countries become independent and stronger economically,

politically and militarily, thereby weakening "our opponents in the capitalist West." We do not hide this; our leaders speak of it at least once a week. Such a development, he claimed, lessened the chances of a world war. This has been a Soviet principle since 1903, he said, and we continue "to pursue this line."⁸⁴ That long-standing Soviet principle had been challenged several times since the inception of the Soviet state, however, and it faced difficulties in the Middle East-Gulf region in the first part of 1983 as well. A major such challenge was the increased direct U.S. military presence in the area,⁸⁵ which had been elicited by the fall of the Shah of Iran; the hostage crisis, when U.S. citizens were held by the Khomeini regime for four-hundred-forty-four days; the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and the beginning of the Iraqi-Iranian War in September 1980. Just as Washington worries about Soviet penetration of the region, so, too, does Moscow worry about U.S. penetration of an area contiguous to Soviet borders which, moreover, has major economic, military and political importance in its own right.⁸⁶

Preceding this series of events by almost a decade was the basic shift in Egyptian policy that had replaced the Soviet Union with the United States as Cairo's major hope for making some progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was self-evident by the early 1980s that United States-Egyptian ties and interests had become intertwined to a very great degree, a development detrimental to Soviet interests. This had been reinforced by President Sadat's expulsion of the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo in 1981 because of Moscow's interference in Egypt's internal affairs.⁸⁷ The firmness of United States-Egyptian ties was demonstrated by Mubarak, notwithstanding the Egyptian President's earlier hint regarding the possible improvement of Soviet-Egyptian relations, when he said in a press conference that "We do

not dangle on the rope."⁸⁸ The "rope" comment clearly was a reference to an earlier complaint that President Sadat had made regarding Moscow's refusal to supply sophisticated weaponry to Cairo so that the latter could pursue its struggle against Israel. That refusal had been a major reason for Sadat's shift in 1972 from reliance on Moscow to reliance on Washington. Mubarak's allusion to that refusal reflected the continuing and deep bitterness over the earlier Soviet policy.

Mubarak once again underscored the firmness of Cairo's relations with Washington when he addressed the Egyptian National Assembly in April 1983. The President told the Assembly that in connection with the recent initialling of the Lebanese-Israeli agreement he had sent "a message to the United States President to express our pride in this achievement and our welcome to the United States to continue to play an active role until . . . peace [in the region] . . . is completed" ⁸⁹ Thus, Mubarak was unstinting in his praise of the agreement to which Moscow was so firmly opposed, and he also reaffirmed Egypt's policy of relying upon the United States, not the Soviet Union, as the actor most able to move the region towards a comprehensive peace.

Given the earlier poor state of Soviet-Egyptian relations and the continuing soundness of United States-Egyptian relations, it is not surprising that Moscow welcomed the hint in Mubarak's inaugural address that an improvement in Soviet-Egyptian relations might be possible, and that it continued to strive for such an improvement. However, there were problems in achieving this, and they went beyond the strong Egyptian-American ties in general, and Cairo's support for "certain elements" in the Reagan Plan in particular. ⁹⁰ For one thing, the Egyptians simply were not convinced

that the Soviets could, or would (?) play a constructive role peace process. Mubarak referred to this when he addressed a meeting of the United States Foreign Policy Association, saying that "We have not up to now seen⁹¹ any effective role for the Soviets" On the other hand, the First Under Secretary of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, an important advisor to Mubarak, Dr. U. al-Baz, subsequently said that Egypt was not opposed to "effective [Soviet] participation in finding a settlement [to the Palestinian problem]. On the contrary, [he said], we cannot deny that the Soviet Union⁹² is an important and influential international party."

However, the general Soviet response both to comments that it was ineffectual, on the one hand, and that it was an influential international actor (thereby implying that if it so desired it could be effective) on the other hand, was that the Arabs expected too much. Perhaps the most powerful expression of this Soviet theme had been made earlier by Brezhnev. In responding to a complaint about Soviet passivity during the Lebanese war by the Libyan leader Colonel Quadaffi, Brezhnev said "We have given you arms . . . , but we cannot liberate Beirut for you, liberate any of your positions⁹³ for you, or liberate Palestine for you. This is a matter for the Arabs." At the beginning of 1983, it was clear that the Soviet position had not changed. One source reported Soviet officials as saying that although Moscow's support for "Egypt's Arab rights" was "automatic," the extent of support wanted by the Arabs was too great. It was said that the latter expected Soviet support for them to equal American support for Israel, and that this was "something . . . the Soviet Union can not do and is not obliged to do . . . ," given the different nature of Soviet-Egyptian and United States-⁹⁴ Israeli relations.

There were additional obstacles to an improvement in Soviet-Egyptian relations, and one of them was Moscow's continuing proclivity to interfere in Egypt's internal affairs. As noted earlier, they had done this in 1981, and there were several references to the same phenomenon in 1983. However, by that time it was clearly much less of a problem.⁹⁵

Finally, Afghanistan was a troublesome problem in Soviet-Egyptian relations. In February 1981, President Sadat had revealed that since the Soviet invasion Egypt had been selling Soviet-made arms to the United States, which in turn was transferring them to the Afghan rebels.⁹⁶ Subsequently, President Mubarak, during a trip to Pakistan, indicated Egypt's support for the Afghan peoples' right "to choose their own government without foreign interference...."⁹⁷ He also was reported to have "expressed Egypt's 'readiness' to offer aid to Afghan refugees"⁹⁸ The arms transfers and even the verbal support for the Afghan people hardly could have endeared Cairo to Moscow.

The Soviet Union, however, did not formulate its foreign policy on the basis of "endearment," and in spite of the many problems, the Soviets persevered in their efforts to improve relations with Cairo. Moreover, although the Egyptians were the more cautious of the two parties, they also wanted to improve relations with the Soviets. In January 1983, Mubarak explicitly expressed his interest in relations with the Soviet Union, and said that ambassadors would be exchanged in the future.⁹⁹ In March, the Egyptian Foreign Minister reported that some Soviet technical experts had returned to Egypt at Mubarak's request, and he also noted that Egyptian-Soviet trade had increased by one hundred million dollars.¹⁰⁰ Also, a protocol on cultural and scientific cooperation was signed the following month.¹⁰¹ These, and subsequent efforts, led to the exchange of ambassadors in 1984.¹⁰²

Beyond what has already been said about Moscow's motivations for trying to improve relations with Cairo, the fact that Egypt had "returned to the Arab fold" was an important factor in that regard. The catalyst for that "return" had been the Iraqi-Iranian War, and the Arab states welcomed Cairo's support in the struggle against Iran. In that connection, Bubarak noted that Egyptian-Iraqi cooperation was close, and also observed that Egypt's relations with Saudi Arabia were "outstanding."¹⁰³ Thus, not only would Moscow be motivated to normalize relations with Cairo because the latter was again influential in Arab affairs, but also because Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union were "on the same side" regarding the Gulf war. Thus, the attempt to improve relations with Cairo was consistent both with Moscow's desire to do the same with Riyadh and with what possibly was its attempt to create the image of a responsible and constructive actor in the Middle East through its moderate declaratory policy towards Israel.¹⁰⁴

Thus the view from Moscow of the Middle East-Gulf region presented a paradox. Ironically, the Soviets were experiencing great difficulties with Iran, America's most virulent protagonist in the region. Teheran's anti-Americanism had not redounded to Moscow's benefit in the form of close Soviet-Iranian relations, as Moscow originally might have hoped. In addition, there were the grinding problems in the triangular relationship between Moscow and its closest "partners" in the area--Syria and the PLO. In contrast to this situation involving these "radical" actors and therefore "natural allies" for the Soviet Union, there was the opportunity to improve relations with Iraq, as well as what appeared to be the possibility of doing so with the two key moderate states of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This was another facet of the

paradox, in that Moscow had been at loggerheads with the previously radical Iraq, as well as with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Finally, it should be remembered that these relationships, which it is not an exaggeration to say were tortuously intertwined, were being played out in an atmosphere of considerable violence and uncertainty, with the Iraqi-Iranian War continuing to exact its terrible toll, and the situation in Lebanon being far from peaceful.

In this challenging context, where there was much at stake, the new Andropov regime orchestrated an overall policy characterized by: a clear view of Moscow's interests; decisiveness combined with an attempt to mitigate the negative results of that very decisiveness; a sense of the long-term; caution when necessary; and the maximum exploitation of whatever opportunities existed. Moscow's salient goals in the Middle East-Gulf region were to control turbulence in the area, to frustrate Washington's policy there, and to avoid direct violent confrontation with the United States. Thus, it made the efforts to end the Iraqi-Iranian War. It also maintained its close relations with Syria, in spite of the latter's policy towards Iran, which was detrimental to Soviet interests. The Soviet commitment to Syria was dictated by the fact that Damascus, during the period under review, was the actor most capable of preventing adoption of the American approach to peace, a development that would have reduced Soviet influence in the region even below the level to which it had fallen in the aftermath of the Beirut siege. However, the Soviet commitment to Syria was not absolute, a fact that was reflected in Moscow's probable pressure on Damascus to break its close ties with Teheran, and a cautious Soviet policy in Lebanon. Although the Soviet Union might have been serious when it said it would use Soviet armed forces to protect Syrian

territory, it was highly unlikely that Moscow would have used those forces in pursuit of Syrian goals in Lebanon, notwithstanding the presence of their military advisors with Syrian units deployed there. Underlying this caution was the overriding concern of both superpowers to avoid a direct military clash with each other.

In spite of its caution, the Soviet Union was decisive when it had to be, witness its policies not only towards Iran and Syria, but also the PLO. When Arafat tentatively agreed with Hussein to follow the American path to peace, he was brought up abruptly. Moscow and its closest ally on this issue, Syria, exerted the heaviest possible pressure on Arafat and the PLO. Even in their decisiveness, however, the Soviets sought to avoid slamming doors completely shut. This could be seen in their policy towards Iran. There were a few positive aspects of the Soviet-Iranian relationship and contacts between the two countries were maintained, in spite of the Soviet shift toward Iraq. Undoubtedly, the motivation for doing so was to be in position to take advantage of any possible future opportunity to improve bilateral relations.

The Soviets exploited whatever opportunities were available, regardless of the ideological tenor of the regimes in question. Moscow developed in a multi-faceted way its relations with Iraq, which had recently projected a much more moderate image to the world than previously had been the case. But the most striking example of being prepared to seize opportunities as they emerged was the Soviet rapprochement with Egypt. Admittedly, the exchange of ambassadors between Moscow and Cairo, which ultimately did take place in mid-1984, was not a revolutionary event in the region's affairs.

Nevertheless, it was an important reversal of what had been the latest chapter in generally sour relations between the two nations for a decade--the expulsion in 1981 of the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo. Given the improvement of relations with Egypt, which had reemerged as a key actor in the Arab world, as a result of the Iraqi-Iranian War, the potential for Moscow to influence events in the region had increased. The same prize--the capability of influencing regional affairs--was what motivated Moscow to be receptive, at least in its declaratory policy, to what was perhaps only Saudi Arabia's flirtation with the idea of establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. On the issue of the Iraqi-Iranian War, the interests of Moscow and Riyadh were consistent with each other. On other issues, however, the two countries were divided. Moreover, their common interest regarding the war was insufficient to move the two countries to any serious discussion about the establishment of relations. The major obstacle to such a move was their conflicting approaches to resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute. The Saudis were prepared to accept some elements of the Reagan Plan. The Soviets were not. This was true in spite of what might be termed the new look in Soviet policy reflected in the Soviet-Egyptian rapprochement and Gromyko's moderate statement that the Soviet Union was opposed to "extremist plans" to destroy Israel. It appeared that the Soviet and Saudi approaches would not be reconciled for some time.

Notwithstanding the apparent lack of any substantial improvement in Soviet-Saudi relations, as well as the other problems that remained for Moscow, most especially those with Iran, the overall Middle East-Gulf policy of the Andropov regime was impressive. That regime had come to power when Soviet

credibility in the region had been seriously eroded, and the United States appeared to be poised for significant successes. Moscow played an important role in preventing those successes from occurring, refurbished its own image somewhat in the process, and increased the substance of its position through the activist and differentiated policy described above.

Notes

- 1
For the texts of the Reagan Plan, the Arab Plan, and a summary of the Brezhnev Plan, see THE NEW YORK TIMES, 9/2/82, p. A1 ; 9/10/82, p. A8; and 9/16/82, p. A14, respectively.
- 2
UKAZ, 1/15/83, p. 3; reported in "Dimensions of Arab Move Towards Moscow," DAILY REPORT: MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA, FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE (hereafter MEA), 1/20/83, p. C2.
- 3
UKAZ, 1/6/83, p. 1; reported in MEA, 1/12/83, pp. A8-A9.
- 4
Initially, Great Britain was not visited by the committee because London objected to a particular PLO member in the committee's delegation.
- 5
UKAZ, 1/6/83, p. 1; reported in MEA, 1/12/83, pp. A8-A9.
- 6
See note 2.
- 7
AL-WATAN AL-Arabi, 4/15/83, pp. 39-41; reported in MEA, 4/20/83, Annex, pp. 1-2. (For Official Use Only.)
- 8
AFP, Paris, 3/27/83; reported in MEA, 3/28/83, p. C3.
- 9
"A Palestinian-Arab Pause is Needed for Self-Appraisal." UKAZ, 4/13/83, p. 3; reported in MEA, 4/20/83, p. C2.
- 10
Reported in MEA, 4/25/83, p. ii.
- 11
KUNA, Kuwait, 1/19/83, reported in MEA, 1/19/83, p. H1.
- 12
Ibid.

13

SANA, Damascus, 1/12/83; reported in MEA, 1/24/83, p. H4.

14

See note 7.

15

Ibid.

16

See note 7.

17

AR-RA'Y, Amman, 5/19/83, pp. 1, 23; reported in MEA, 5/19/83, pp. A1-A2.

18

V.S. Zorin, K.N. Brutents, A.Y. Bovin, "Studio 9" (Moscow Television Service); reported in DAILY REPORT: SOVIET UNION, FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE, 2/27/84, p. CC12.

19

Radio Monte Carlo, Paris, 4/25/83; reported in MEA, 4/26/83, p. H2.

20

Ibid.

21

ASH SHARQ, 5/10/83, p. 4; reported in MEA, 5/12/83, p. H2.

22

See note 18, p. CC13.

23

Riyadh Domestic Service, 5/7/83; reported in MEA, 5/9/83, p. C3.

24

AL-NADWAY, cited by Saudi Press Agency, 5/11/83; reported in MEA, 5/12/83, p. C3.

25

AL-HAWADITH, London, 5/20/83, p. 31; reported in MEA, 5/20/83, pp. C3-C4.

26

Riyadh Domestic Service, 5/18/83; reported in MEA, 5/18/83, p. C4.

- 27
AR-RIYADH, cited by Riyadh Domestic Service; reported in MEA, 5/18/83,
p. C4. UKAZ, 5/12/83, p. 3; reported in MEA, 5/19/83, p. C4.
- 28
AL-JAZIRAH, cited by SPA, Riyadh, 5/9/83; reported in MEA, 5/10/83,
p. C2.
- 29
Riyadh Domestic Service, 1/18/83; reported in MEA, 1/19/83, p. C6.
- 30
Reported in MEA, 3/11/83, p. 1.
- 31
Riyadh Domestic Service, 5/15/83; reported in MEA, 5/16/83, pp. C2-C4.
- 32
See Herbert L. Sawyer, SOVIET PERCEPTIONS OF THE OIL FACTOR IN U.S.
FOREIGN POLICY: THE MIDDLE EAST-GULF REGION (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press,
1983), pp. 95-115.
- 33
See note 31.
- 34
MA'ARIV, Tel Aviv, 1/17/83, p. 5; reported in MEA, 1/18/83, pp. 17-18.
- 35
AL-MUSTAQBAL, Paris, 1/8/83, pp. 1, 17, reported in MEA, 1/13/83, p. C5.
- 36
SPA, Riyadh, 3/22/83; reported in MEA, 3/23/83, p. C3.
- 37
Ibid., 4/2/83; reported in MWA, 4/4/83, p. C6.
- 38
Ibid.
- 39
UKAZ, 1/15/83, p. 3; reported in MEA, 1/20/83, pp. C2-C3.

40

Statement made by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, reported by Radio Monte Carlo, Paris, 1/7/83; reported in MEA, 1/10/83, p. E3. See also interview with Aziz by Eric Rouleau, Le MONDE, 1/18/83, pp. 1-6; reported in MEA, 1/11/83, p. E5, in which Aziz said that Arab countries stopped helping Iraq in 1982, and that total receipts were \$20 billion, not the \$50 billion reported in the press.

41

On the one hand, in January 1983 Andropov was reported to have told a Palestinian delegation in Moscow "'to coordinate with Syria, if you want to remain alive.'" (See MEA, 1/24/83, pp. i-ii.) On the other hand, in April 1983, when Syrian-PLO tensions were escalating dramatically, the Qatari News Agency quoted an unnamed Palestinian official who reported with approval that Arafat had exchanged three messages with Moscow within the previous two weeks. Arafat asked specific questions and received written answers. It was added that this was the first time in the history of Soviet-PLO relations that answers to Palestinian questions had been received in forty-eight hours. (See MEA, 4/8/83, p. A4.)

42

See Sawyer, pp. 47-58.

43

AL-HAWADITH, London, 2/11/83, pp. 26-30; reported in MEA, 2/18/83, p. E8.

44

THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1/16/80, p. 6.

45

Ibid., 4/14/81, p. A3.

46

Reported in MEA, 1/25/83, p. ii. Evidently the editorial did not consider Iraq, or at least the Saddam Husayn regime, to be Islamic.

47

See, for example, THE NEW YORK TIMES, 11/21/82, section IV, p. 2.
and the Iraqi News Agency, 3/8/83, reported in MEA, 3/9/83, p. E1 for reports
of an Iraqi view in this regard.

48

See note 43.

49

John Bulloch, "Soviet Arms for Iraq." THE DAILY TELEGRAM, 1/11/83,
pp. 1,2; reported in MEA, 1/11/83, p. E6.

50

INA, Baghdad, 4/8/83; reported in MEA, 4/8/83, p. A5.

51

Reported in MEA, 1/25/83, p. ii.

52

Reported in ibid., 2/7/83, p. i.

53

Reported in ibid., 2/22/83, p. iii.

54

Reported in ibid., 5/2/83, p. ii-iii.

55

Reported in ibid., 5/16/83, p. ii.

56

THE NEW YORK TIMES, 5/5/83, pp. A1, A6; 5/6/83, p. 3.

57

Ibid.

58

IRNA, Teheran, reported in MEA, 2/1/83, p. iii.

59

Reported in MEA, 4/22/83, p. i.

60

Reported in ibid., 5/16/83, p. ii.

- 61 Soviet-Egyptian relations are discussed subsequently.
- 62 Teheran Radio; reported in MEA, 4/6/83, p. ii.
- 63 Moscow Radio; reported in MEA, 4/13/83, p. i.
- 64 IRNA, Teheran; reported in MEA, 5/18/83, p. ii.
- 65 AKHBAR AL-USBU', Amman, 4/7/83, pp. 1, 28; reported in MEA, 4/7/83, p. F1.
- 66 Reported in MEA, 3/10/83, p. 1.
- 67 Reported in ibid., 5/11/83, p. ii.
- 68 Reported in ibid., 4/13/83, p. ii.
- 69 Reported in ibid., 4/27/83, p. ii.
- 70 Reported in ibid., 4/13/83, p. ii.
- 71 Riyadh Domestic Service; reported in MEA, 1/19/83, p. C6.
- 72 HA'ARETZ, Tel Aviv; reported in MEA, 4/25/83, p. I6.
- 73 Voice of Lebanon, Beirut, 3/16/83; reported in ibid., 3/17/83, p. C2. See also Voice of Hope, Beirut, 3/16/83; reported in ibid.
- 74 Cited in MA'ARIV, Tel Aviv, 3/17/83, p. 5; reported in MEA, 3/18/83, p. I3.
- 75 AL-WATAN AL-ARABI, Paris, 4/1/83, p. 16; reported in MEA, 4/1/83, Annex, p. 2. (For Official Use Only.)

76
See pp. 6-7.

77
See note 16.

78
See note 8.

79
YEDI'OT AHARONOT, Tel Aviv, 4/5/83, p. 10; reported in MEA, 4/6/83, p. 12.

80
See note 36.

81
ROSE AL-YUSUF, Cairo, 1/10/83, pp. 16-17, 68-69; reported in MEA, 1/19/83,
p. D3.

82
Ibid.

83
AL-MAJALLAH, London, 2/12-18/83, p. 13; reported in MEA, 2/14/83, p. D1.

84
See note 81, p. D5.

85
See note 81, p. D3.

86
See note 42.

87
KUNA, Kuwait, 1/11/83; reported in MEA, 1/12/83, pp. D1-D2.

88
Cairo Domestic Service, 4/7/83; reported in MEA, 4/8/83, p. D5.

89
Cairo Domestic Service, 5/14/83; reported in MEA, 5/16/83, p. D1.

90
MENA, Cairo, 1/22/83; reported in MEA, 1/24/83, p. D3.

91
"Mubarak Addresses U.S. Foreign Policy Association," MENA, Cairo,
1/28/83; reported in MEA, 1/31/83, p. D7.

- 92
MENA, Cairo, 2/15/83; reported in MEA, 2/16/83, p. D1.
- 93
Tripoli Domestic Service, 2/17/83; reported in MEA, 2/23/83, p. Q1.
- 94
See note 31, p. D4.
- 95
Ibid. See also note 90.
- 96
THE NEW YORK TIMES, 9/23/81, p. 15.
- 97
Reported in MEA, 4/12/83, p. ii.
- 98
Reported in ibid., 4/13/83, p. 1.
- 99
Cairo Domestic Service, 1/9/83; reported in MEA, 1/11/83, p. D10.
- 100
Beirut Domestic Service, 3/23/83; reported in MEA, 3/24/83, p. D3.
- 101
Radio Monte Carlo, Paris, 4/24/83; reported in MEA, 4/25/83, p. D4.
- 102
THE NEW YORK TIMES, 7/29/84, p. 13.
- 103
MENA, Cairo, 1/21/83; reported in MEA, 1/24/83, p. D2.
- 104
See note 79.